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ASTONISHING X-MEN®

JOSS WHEDON • JOHN CASSADAY

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SO AGENT BRAND HAS PROMISED YOU COLOSSUS.

IF I CAN STALL YOU, KEEP YOU FROM FIRING THE RETALIATOR, I AM TO HAVE THE METAL MAN.

AND, OF COURSE, YOUR THRONE.

SHE THINKS US CHILDREN.

LIKE ALL OUTWORLDERS, BRAND MISTAKES AGGRESSION FOR THUGGISHNESS.

TO KILL THE WEAK IS THE HONORED PATH. BUT TO LIE, TO SMILE AND SCHEME...

THIS IS WHY ORD FAILED. TAINTED BY HUMAN *"DIPLOMACY."*

AND YOU HAVE BEEN FORCED TO BECOME A PLAYER IN THEIR LOW GAME.

I AM TRULY SORRY. WHEN THIS IS OVER, I WILL RIP OUT YOUR OTHER ARM AS A SIGN TO OTHERS OF YOUR LOYALTY.

AS YOU SAY IT, IT SHALL BE SO.

AND YOU WILL, YES, "STALL" ME. THEY DON'T YET KNOW I HAVE NO CONTROL OVER THE RETALIATOR. IT WILL FIRE IN TWO DAYS' TIME NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS HERE.

LET THE X-MEN PLAY FOR TIME THEY DO NOT HAVE. LET US SEE IF BRAND DELIVERS US COLOSSUS...

...AND IF THE MACHINE CAN BRING ME AN X-MAN TO TALK TO.

OR A CORPSE TO PLAY WITH...

CONFUSED?

YOU THINK I CANNOT PIERCE A DIAMOND?

OH, HAVE I HARDENED? DEFENSE MECHANISM; QUITE UNCONSCIOUS.

THERE NOW.

BETTER?

THIS IS A TRICK.

HUSH NOW. KILL AWAY.

KRUUN WILL WANT YOU ALIVE.

NONSENSE. HE'LL BE THRILLED. SHOWER YOU WITH GARLANDS AND WEAR MY SKIN LIKE A SHAWL.

WHAT GAME ARE YOU PLAYING?

OH, I'M A TERRIBLE PERSON AND I'M WRACKED WITH GUILT, HAVEN'T YOU BEEN FOLLOWING?

IF YOU SHAKE HARDER MY NECK MIGHT SNAP... IF THAT HELPS AT ALL...

SHALL I TELL YOU WHY YOU HAVEN'T KILLED ME YET?

BECAUSE YOU CAN'T.

YOU THINK I CARE ABOUT A HUMAN LIFE?

DON'T BE DIM, SWEETIE; I KNOW YOU WERE PROGRAMMED TO KILL AND YOU HATE MUTANTS ABOVE ALL THINGS AND WHO COULD BLAME YOU BUT HONESTLY, LET'S LOOK AT YOUR SCORECARD TO DATE.

WING--

KILLED HIMSELF. YOU DIDN'T STOP HIM, DID A LITTLE COACHING AND THAT GAVE YOU A FLUSH OF POWER. BROUGHT YOUR CHANGE, THIS TERRIBLY ORIGINAL FORM.

AND YOU DEFEATED THE ENTIRE TEAM! THE FABLED X-MEN, LYING DEFENSELESS AT YOUR FEET.

AND WHAT DID YOU DO THEN?

YOU WALKED AWAY.

AND NO B-VILLAIN CRAP ABOUT XAVIER, OR WANTING TO SEE US SUFFER; YOU SCAMPERED.

I DIDN'T LET YOU TAKE ME OUT THAT DAY BECAUSE YOU KNEW MY SECRET.

I DID IT BECAUSE I KNEW YOURS.

I DID NEED KITTY TO EXPLAIN THE MECHANICS, BUT YOU WERE PROGRAMMED TO KILL US AND THEN SADDLED WITH A "*PARENT PROGRAM*" THAT STOPPED YOU.

THE ROGUE SENTINEL, THE ALLIANCE WITH THAT NON-WIT, ORD... DESPERATE ATTEMPTS TO GET ***SOMEONE*** TO DO WHAT YOU STILL CAN'T.

EMMA... GET BEHIND ME...

WHY I FIND SUCH PATENTLY IDIOTIC CHIVALRY A TURN-ON IS TRULY A MYSTERY TO ME. BUT YOU, "*DANGER*"...

YOU'RE AN OPEN BLACKBERRY.

YOU NEVER GOT OVER YOUR PARENT PROGRAMMING.

IF IT'S ANY CONSOLATION, NOBODY EVER DOES.

UM...CAN I GET KIND OF A SIT-REP HERE?

I'M ABOUT TO MAKE OUR DREAD ARCH-NEMESIS AN OFFER.

AND I'LL BET SHE CAN GUESS WHAT IT IS.

WHOOF.

KITTY, I --

WAIT.

NOT DONE WITH "WHOOF".

YOU'RE MORE THAN I COULD HAVE IMAGINED.

AND I'VE *IMAGINED.*

AGHANNE SAYS YOU'RE TO LEAVE AT FIRST LIGHT. OUR SCOUTS HAVE MADE CONTACT WITH YOUR FRIEND LOGAN.

YOU HAVE ABOUT AN HOUR, IF YOU WISH TO CONTINUE FORNICATING.

THAT ONE IS DAFI?

LIKE THE DUCK.

YOU CAN ASK ME NOW.

WHY?

WHY SO SOON--SO SUDDENLY?

EVERYTHING IS SO FRAGILE.

THERE'S SO MUCH CONFLICT, SO MUCH PAIN...YOU KEEP WAITING FOR THE DUST TO SETTLE AND THEN YOU REALIZE THIS IS IT; THE DUST IS YOUR LIFE GOING ON.

IF HAPPY COMES ALONG--THAT WEIRD, UNBEARABLE DELIGHT THAT'S ACTUAL HAPPY--I THINK YOU HAVE TO GRAB IT WHILE YOU CAN.

YOU TAKE WHAT YOU CAN GET, 'CAUSE IT'S HERE, AND THEN...

"...GONE."

I WAS IN GENOSHA.

THE DAY AFTER, WE WERE ALL THERE, SIFTING THROUGH A *CONTINENT* OF ASH AND BONE.

I MADE JOKES.

WE NEED A SHIP.

IT'S A NATURAL ENOUGH RESPONSE, I SUPPOSE, TO UNIMAGINABLE HORROR--

LET'S THINK DEEP THOUGHTS LATER, PROFESSOR. THERE *WILL* BE SURVIVORS AND WE *DON'T* WANT TO MEET THEM.

WE NEED TO RAID THAT SHIPYARD AND GET TO THE DAMN MOONBASE.

I THINK NOT.

WE TAKE THE SHIP IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION.

WE GO AND FIND MY FRIENDS.

SENTIMENT ISN'T EXACTLY USEFUL RIGHT NOW. IF YOU CAN'T THINK CLEARLY...

KRUUN KNOWS WE'RE HEADED FOR THE MOONBASE. HE HIT US WITH AN *ICE AGE*-- YOU DON'T THINK HE'LL HAVE THE BASE DEFENDED?

WE GO BACK, PICK UP THE SUPER HEROES YOU SAID YOU SO DESPERATELY NEEDED, AND SLING AROUND TO THE MOON ITSELF WHILE HE'S WAITING FOR US TO HIT THE BASE. IT'S SAFER AND SMARTER.

AND, AGENT? DON'T EVER DISPARAGE SENTIMENT...

...UNTIL YOU'VE ACTUALLY FELT ONE.

STAY LOW!

IF THEY ENGAGE, RETURN FIRE AND FALL BACK IN ALPHA-KREE FORMATION.

MAYBE IT'LL MISS US...

NO.

IT WON'T.

WE THOUGHT YOU GUYS WERE TOAST.

LIKEWISE. HOW MANY ARE YOU?

WHOLE SQUAD'S INTACT. THIRTY SOULS, BUT WE GOT NO TRANSPORT.

YOU DO NOW.

AND THAT WOULD BE TRANSPORT TO WHERE, EXACTLY?

SO THE MACHINE FAILED ME AS WELL.

THE X-MEN ARE GATHERED. ON A TRANSPORT SHIP. IT CAME OUT OF THE STRIKE-QUAD HALF-FROZEN, A BORDER DROID CLICKED ON THE ANOMALOUS HEAT SIG.

LUCK, THEN.

THERE'S MORE.

WHEN THE X-MEN RENDEZVOUSED, COLOSSUS AND SOME OTHERS WERE RECORDED WITH AN UNREG.

ONE OF AGHANNE'S.

GRRAAHNNGGH!!

THAT WOMAN IS MORE DANGEROUS THAN A HUNDRED PROPHECIES.

IF HER MADNESS SPREADS...

THE TRANSPORT HAS EYES FOR US?
OH YES.
SHOW ME.
YOU PUT THAT *THING* IN CHARGE OF MY MEN?
CAN SHE POSSIBLY DO A WORSE JOB THAN YOU?
DRAGON!
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU GOT DRAGGED INTO THIS TOO! WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN HIDING?
IT'S A KILLING MACHINE!
TECHNICALLY...
DIDN'T YOU SAY YOUR MEN WERE EXPENDABLE? IN MY MEMORY, YOU SAID THAT.
WHAT'S WRONG? ARE YOU HUNGRY, LITTLE FELLA?
OH FOR GOD'S SAKE, STOP SIMPERING AT HIM!

LOCKHEED WORKS FOR US.

HE'S BEEN DOING SURVEILLANCE ON YOUR TEAM SINCE YOU REJOINED.

WOW.

YOU'RE SO UNPLEASANT EVEN *I'M* IMPRESSED. DO YOU VISIT ORPHANAGES TO EXPLAIN THERE'S NO SANTA?

THIS IS EXACTLY YOUR PROBLEM! INFANTILIZING ALIEN RACES...

...THAT DRAGON SPEAKS MORE LANGUAGES THAN THE PROFESSOR; HE'S NOT SOME STARLET'S CHIHUAHUA.

LOCKHEED HAS SOME HOMEWORLD ISSUES WE'RE HELPING HIM WITH.

PRESSING ISSUES.

BRAND, YOUR FILES SHOW NO MENTION OF THIS *"AGHANNE"*.

WELL, NO, OF COURSE. IF WHAT RASPUTIN SAYS ABOUT HER IS TRUE, SHE'LL HAVE BEEN EXPUNGED.

I'M AMAZED SHE'S ALIVE AT ALL.

COMING UP ON THE MOON...

WELL, WE NEED TO TALK TO HER.

DISTURBING LACK OF SECURITY...

IF HER INTERPRETATION OF THE PROPHECY IS TRUE.. IF PETER IS SOMEHOW INVOLVED IN *SAVING* THIS RACE...

I DON'T KNOW. THE KID AND I HAVE BEEN SEEING THIS PLACE AT GROUND LEVEL...

STILL NOT CALLING ME *"ARMOR"*...

...I KINDA LIKE THE VERSION WHERE PETE BLOWS IT UP.

OKAY, PEOPLE. WE GOT MORE BAD NEWS...

WE *EXPECTED* THE MOON TO BE FORTIFIED. YOU DON'T THINK WE CAN LAND?

YOU KNOW, I THOUGHT I'D HAVE A LOT MORE FUN IF I EVER GOT TO SAY THIS...

SAY WHAT?

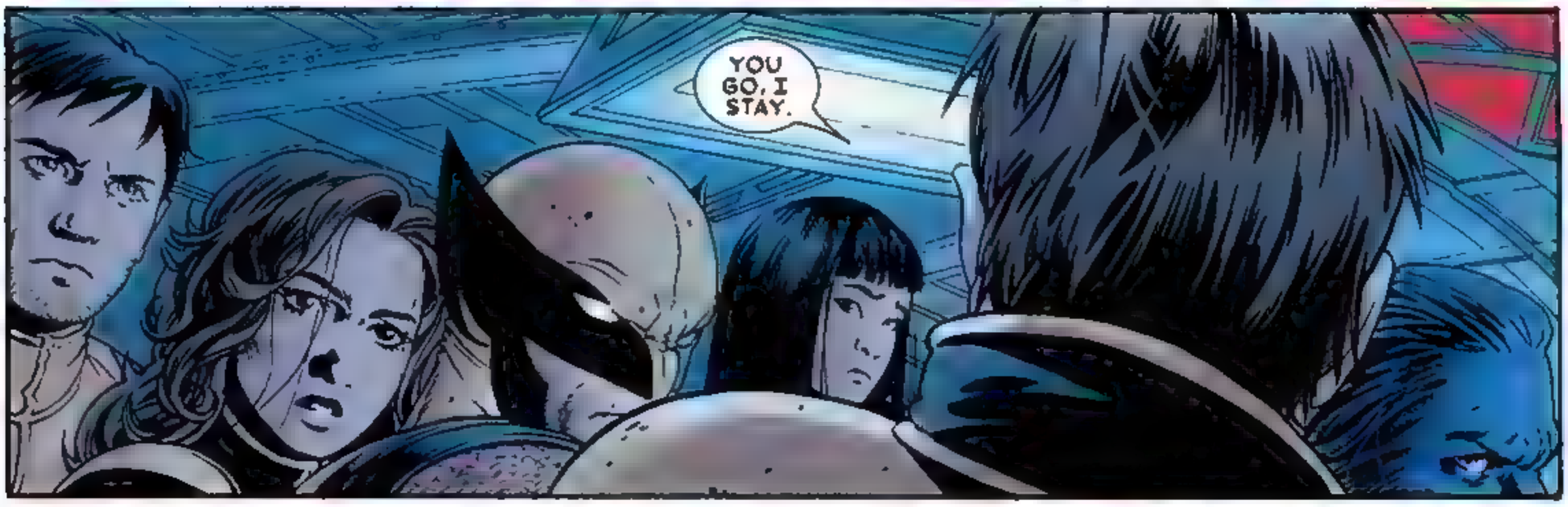
"THAT'S NO MOON."

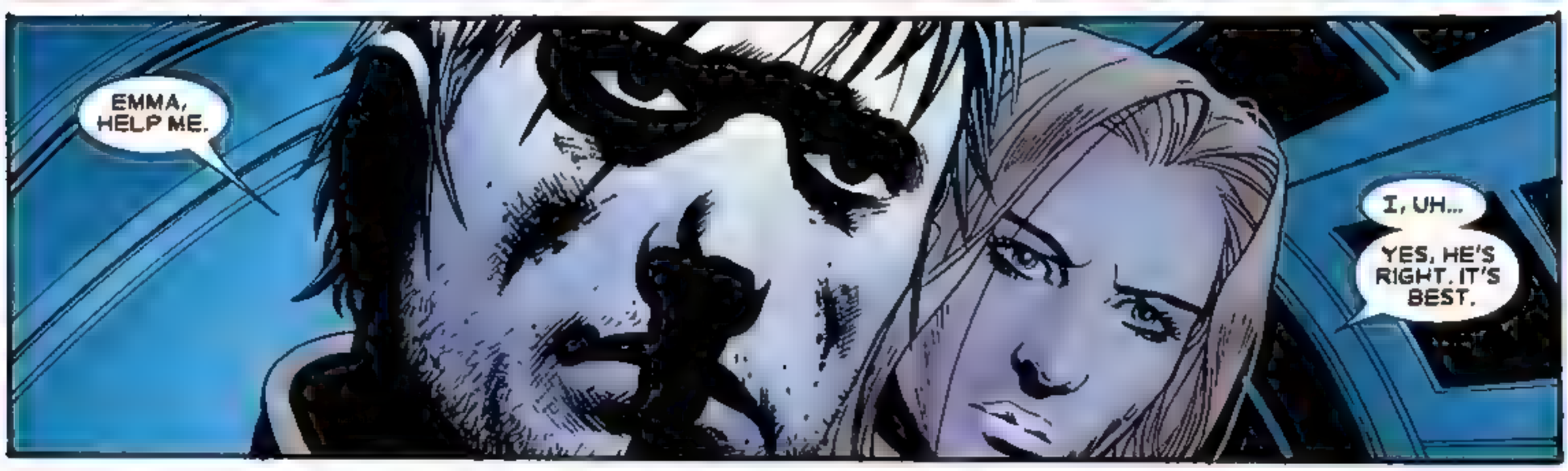
ALL THAT JUST TO FIRE ONE MISSILE.

A MISSILE TEN MILES LONG.

WELL, I DIDN'T BRING YOU HERE FOR NOTHING.

WE OUTRUN THESE WARSHIPS NEVER.
WE GOT A PLAN? I DON'T WANNA PLAY "MAN WHO FELL TO EARTH" AGAIN.
THERE'S A REPAIR CRAFT IN THE BACK. FITS ONE


YOU GO, I STAY.


EMMA, HELP ME.
I, UH...
YES, HE'S RIGHT. IT'S BEST.

THEY'LL COME AFTER ME. IT'LL BUY YOU TIME. AND IF ANYTHING HAPPENS, I'M THE MOST...

I'M THE ONE WITH NO POWERS.

YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE THE LEADER.

THAT'S WHY I'M ACTING LIKE ONE.

THEY'RE GAINING...

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO KEEP KRUUN FROM FINDING OUT ABOUT OUR ACE IN THE HOLE.

LEVIATHAN?

IT'S OUR BEST HOPE NOW. THE REST OF YOU KEEP LOW UNTIL LEVIATHAN SHOWS UP. PETE, IT'S TOO DANGEROUS FOR YOU TO MAKE CONTACT WITH AGHANNE. EMMA WILL GO INSTEAD.

I OBJECT!

KITTY?

TO...ALL OF THIS! YOU'RE NOT JUST GONNA THROW YOUR LIFE AWAY AFTER... ALL OF THIS...

GUESS EMMA'S RUNNING THE SHOW. THAT'LL BE INTERESTING.

EXCUSE ME, I'M THE ONE WHO'S GONNA BE --

DON'T EVEN DREAM IT.

GOOD LUCK, SUMMERS.

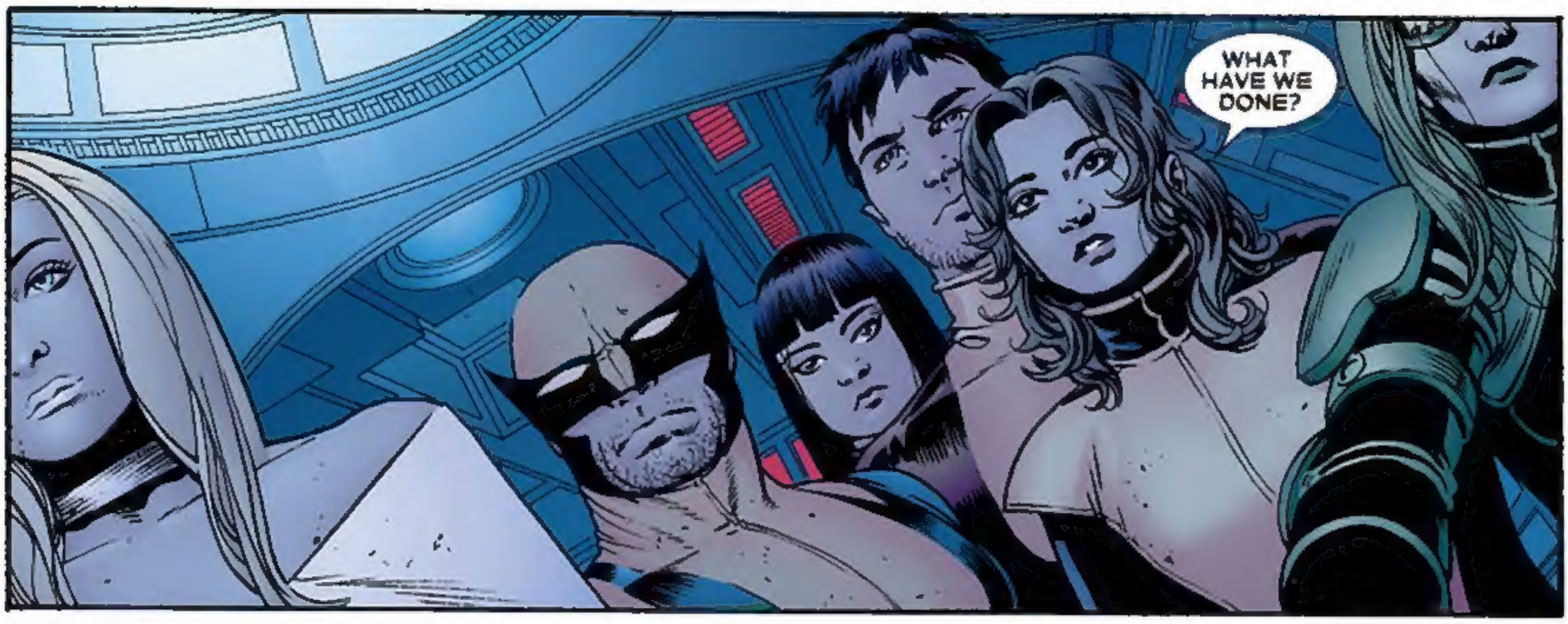
STAY AWAY FROM KRUUN, STAY AWAY FROM THE PRISON-- EVEN IF THEY TAKE ME ALIVE.

EMMA.

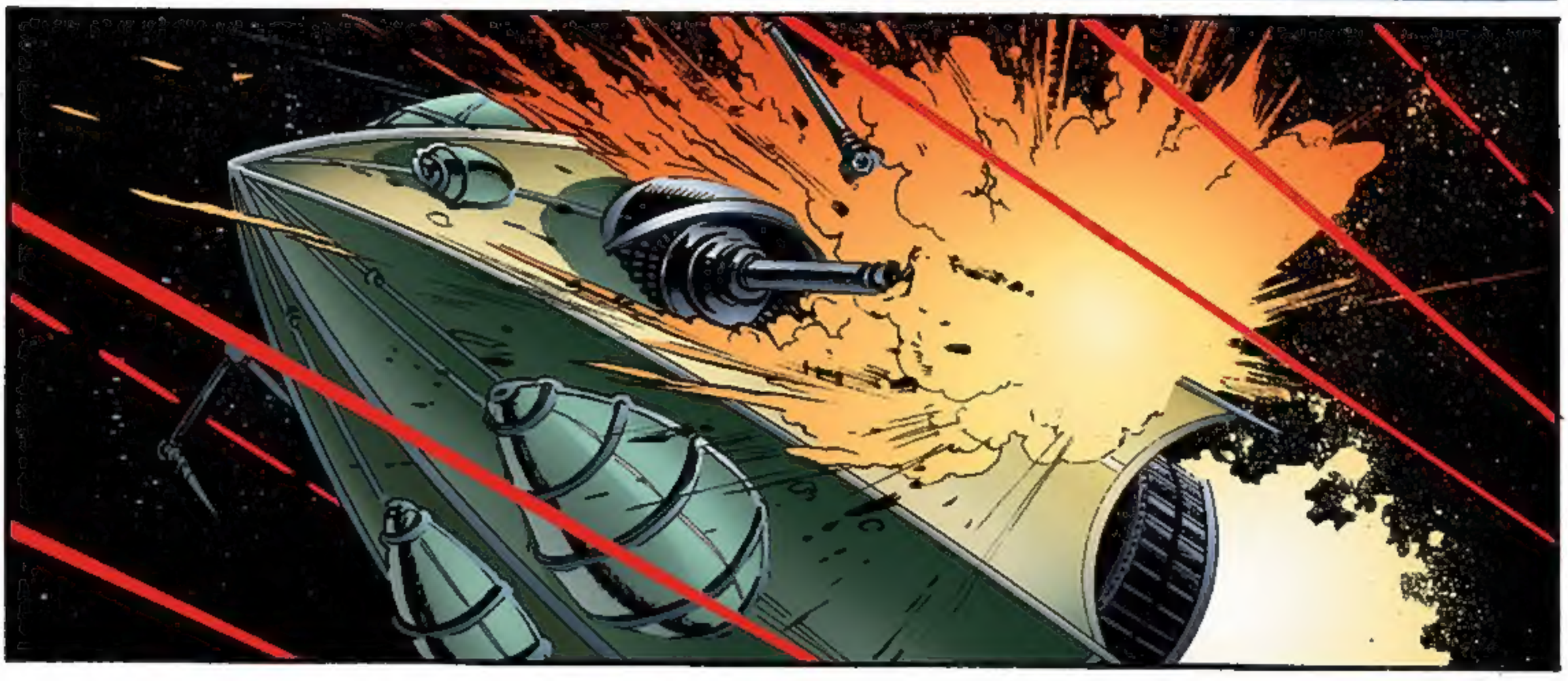
DARLING?

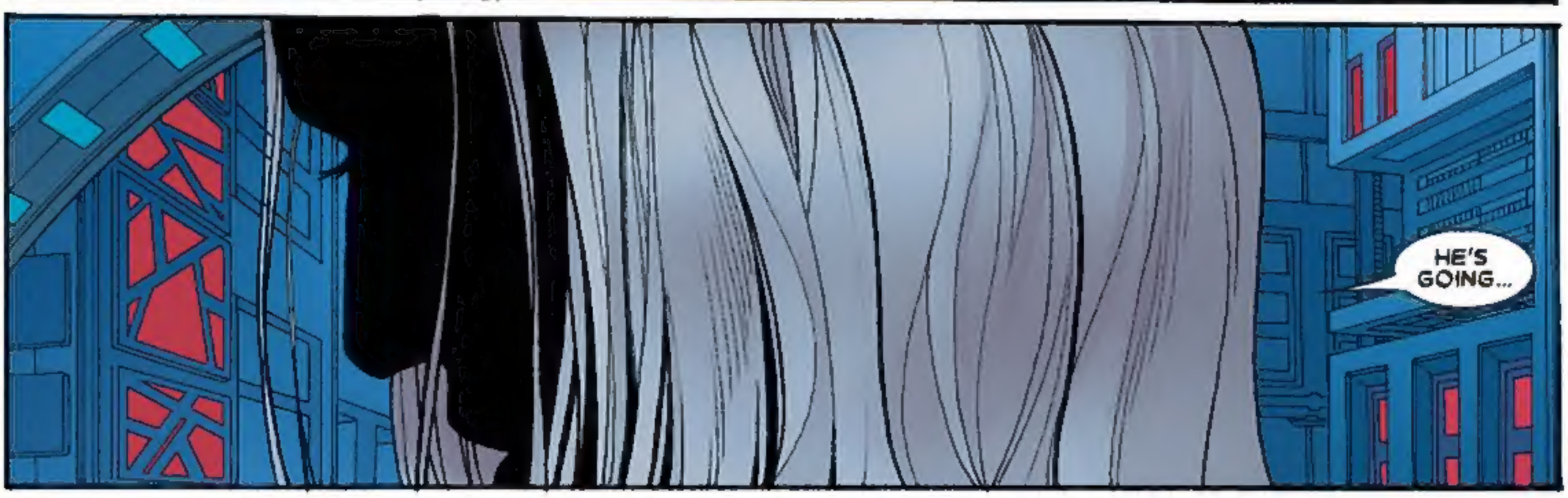
THEY'RE ALL YOURS.

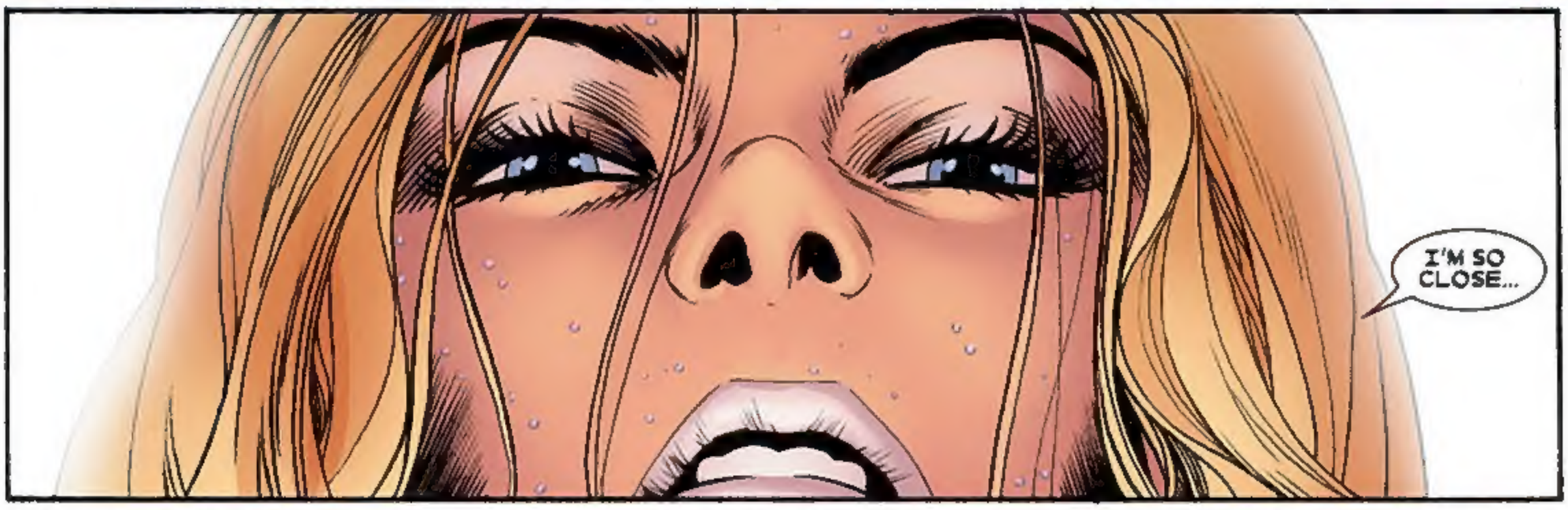
"MAKE ME PROUD."

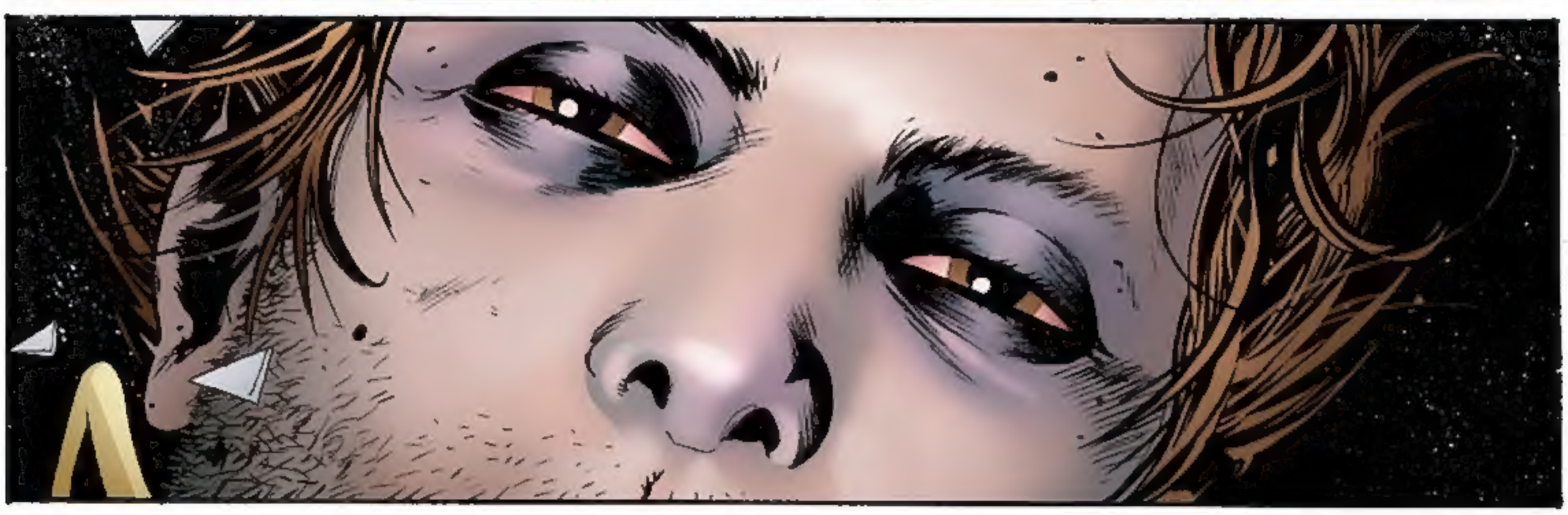

WHAT HAVE WE DONE?

GIVE 'EM HELL, BOSS.




HE'S GOING...


I'M SO CLOSE...



NICE TO MEET YOU TOO...

WHAT A FUTURE YOU HAVE AHEAD OF YOU...

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EMPIRE